

talking points.

The FDFA's take on current events



Hello,

It's a milestone, and the result of several years' hard work. The Federal Council announced today that it has taken note of the material conclusion of negotiations with the European Union (EU) on the 'package approach' aimed at stabilising and further developing the bilateral approach underpinning Switzerland's relationship with the EU. Following a statement by the president of the Swiss Confederation, Viola Amherd, and the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, three representatives of the Federal Council will brief the media on the issue this afternoon (Friday). The press conference can be followed live [via this link](#).

Looking beyond current events, the EU has been a Swiss foreign policy issue for decades. This is therefore the perfect opportunity to take a brief look back at some of the landmark decisions and key moments in our relations with the EU, including photos and quotes from the time.

Parliament and the people have vital roles to play in Switzerland's foreign policy. Decisions are taken, choices are made. This has been and will continue to be the case for Europe, but also for the budget, which will provide a framework for our action in 2025.

2024 also marked the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Over the past year, we have stressed time and time again that international humanitarian law must be respected. But the fact is that neither multilateralism nor international law were able to prevent the conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine or Sudan and their tragic humanitarian consequences. That's a reality, and a harsh one.

And yet, over the past three quarters of a century, the Geneva Conventions have saved millions of lives. They've reunited thousands of separated family members and provided solace to countless prisoners of war. As Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis said in his address to the Security Council in New York in November: "We must urgently find a common basis of humanity and build a structure of peace firmly anchored in international law, including the UN Charter and international humanitarian law."

Far from Europe and New York, we'll also be heading to India in the company of Ambassador Maya Tissafi.

Happy reading, and best wishes for the festive season!

Nicolas Bideau
Head of FDFA Communication

let's get to the point.

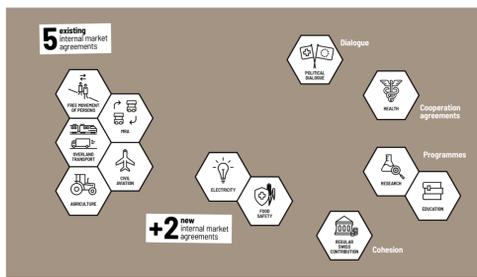


Europe

The Federal Council has just announced ([press release](#)) that it has today (20 December) taken note of the **material conclusion of negotiations** with the European Union on the 'package approach'. In practical terms, this means that discussions with the EU on the content of this package are over, and that the two chief negotiators have been able to reach an agreement. This outcome follows months of very intensive negotiations. Around 200 negotiating sessions took place between the two delegations since the process started in March. To save you doing the maths, that's an average of 22 sessions per month, or more than five per week.

The documents still need to be legally finalised and translated, but this is a **major step** towards the formal conclusion of the negotiations, scheduled for before the summer of 2025. This will see the final text of the agreements 'initialled' (as it's officially known) by the two chief negotiators. The Federal Council will then decide whether to sign the agreements and put them out to consultation.

What is the package approach? Firstly, its objective is to stabilise and further develop the bilateral approach that forms the cornerstone of our relations with the EU. The package approach comprises a number of thematic elements, including the updating of five major market access agreements, the conclusion of new agreements (on electricity, food safety and health) and institutional solutions. These are summarised in the image below. Full details of the package approach, as well as detailed factsheets setting out what has been achieved in the negotiations, can also be found on [this page](#).



Remember that you can catch up with all the latest news on Switzerland's European policy at any time on [our website](#).

The events of 20 December 2024 are only the latest landmark moment in our 'recent' history with Europe, the first of which came in **1972**. Indeed, 'landmark' was the word used by Zurich-based weekly magazine Die Weltwoche, which wrote that its 'significance could be compared to the Federal Charter of 1291, the Battle of Marignano, the Peace of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna and the foundation of the Federal State in 1848' ([Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland, dods.ch/36211, page 3](#)). The event in question was the **free trade agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC)**.



It was signed on behalf of Switzerland by Federal Councillor Ernst Brugger (in the centre in the photo, [dods.ch/50546](#)) in Brussels on 22 July 1972. Seated next to Brugger on the left is Paul Jolles, chief negotiator and Director of the Trade Division of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs. The Swiss electorate and the cantons approved the free trade agreement on 3 December 1972, with 72.5% voting in favour.

A second milestone came in **1992**, when the Swiss people narrowly (50.3%) **rejected membership of the European Economic Area**. Speaking on the evening the result of the popular vote was announced, 6 December, Federal Councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz called it a "black Sunday". An extraordinary session of Parliament was held the following day. René Felber, then President of the Swiss Confederation, spoke on behalf of the executive: "The Federal Council acknowledges and respects this decision. It regrets that Switzerland is renouncing the possibilities of openness offered to it and also breaking its policy of rapprochement with Europe, which has been the political approach adopted since after the Second World War." ([dods.ch/61162, page 6](#))



Following this turning point in the history of Swiss–European relations, from 1994 the **Federal Council** began bilateral and sectoral negotiations with the EU on overland transport, civil aviation, the free movement of persons, research, public procurement, technical barriers to trade and agriculture. These resulted in the **Bilateral Agreements I**, signed in 1999 and approved by 67.2% of the Swiss electorate in May 2000. A second group of agreements, the **Bilateral Agreements II**, were signed in 2004 and approved by 54.6% of the electorate in June 2005. They cover issues such as the fight against fraud and Switzerland's participation in the Schengen/Dublin system (asylum, migration, justice and policing).

This established the **bilateral approach** that now underpins Switzerland's relationship with the EU. Following the Federal Council's decision in May 2021 not to sign the **institutional agreement** with the EU, dialogue with the European institutions resumed in 2022. This was based on the package approach referred to at the start of this article, which therefore followed on from the Bilateral Agreements I and II. After a series of exploratory and technical talks, the final negotiating mandate with the EU was approved by the Federal Council on 8 March 2024.

That brings us back to December 2024. Right up to date – until the next stage in the process. One of these will be the preparation of a dispatch for Parliament, covering the package of agreements, the adapted Swiss legislation and the accompanying measures, which will probably be sent in early 2026.

end point.

And finally, we return to the **chairs designed by the FDFA** to mark the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Any idea where they might be now? In fact, the chairs can currently be found in **Freetown, New York, Bern and of course Geneva**, ensuring that their symbolism and the story they tell reach as wide an audience as possible. The message is simple: international humanitarian law must continue to be respected worldwide. Here they are [on video](#) at an event organised by Switzerland at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

CONTACT

FDFA Communication
Federal Palace West
3003 Bern

kommunikation@fdfa.admin.ch



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